DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 725 SP 041 563

AUTHOR Brylinsky, Jody

TITLE National Standards for Athletic Coaches. ERIC Digest.

INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, Washington, DC.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

REPORT NO EDO-SP-2002-02

PUB DATE 2002-10-00

NOTE 4p.

CONTRACT ED-99-CO-0007

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PUB TYPE ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Athletic Coaches; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Injuries; *National Standards; Nutrition; Preservice Teacher Education; Professional Development; Skill Development

IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests; Psychosocial Factors; Sport Injuries

ABSTRACT

This digest asserts that the question of coach preparation and training has become a priority issue for many schools and communities, though the research is limited. It examines reasons to have coach education; the scope of sport participation; the status of coach education and training in the United States; National standards for coach education; and the national standard/domains for coaching education. The National Standards for Athletic Coaches (NSAC) document contains 37 standards grouped into eight domains of knowledge and ability: injury prevention, care, and management; risk management; growth, development, and learning; training, conditioning, and nutrition; social/psychological aspects; skills, tactics, and strategies; teaching and administration, and professional preparation and development. The digest asserts that establishment and support of national standards for coach education provides the core for an integrated system of preparing qualified coaches. National standards assure the public that professional preparation meets the critical needs of its constituency. Established standards foster continued improvement in the content and delivery of professional curricula and in the selection, guidance, supervision, and assessment of the professional preparation of coaches. The establishment of NSAC provides a consistent framework from which coach educators and coaching practitioners may establish accountability and credibility in the coaching profession. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

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By

Jody Brylinsky

October 2002 EDO-SP-2002-02

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education

SP041563

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October 2002 EDO-SP-2002-02

National Standards for Athletic Coaches

Jody Brylinsky

Why Have Coach Education?

Over a decade has passed since Conn and Razor (1989) proclaimed "a legal and moral responsibility...to provide qualified individuals to coach young people" (p. 161) yet there has been little interest in examining how best to develop that level of expertise in professional training (Abraham & Collins, 1998). The question of coach preparation and training has become a priority issue for many schools and communities. However, there is limited research on the inexact science of coaching and the complex dynamic social activity in which the coach is engaged (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002).

Public complaints, including increasing litigation, often claim a failure of coaches to properly instruct skills or techniques, warn of inherent danger/risks, or gain appropriate training prior to assuming leadership responsibility in a sport program (Johnson, 1992). The appointment of unprepared individuals to coaching positions could lead to serious medical problems for the athletes and serious legal problems for sport organizations (Conn & Razor, 1989). Further, investigation of the multifaceted social relationships between coach and athlete is necessary to more fully understand how coach training can be linked to more effectively meeting the psychological and physical development of athletes (Potrac, Brewer, Jones, Armour, & Hoff, 2000).

Scope of Sport Participation

Recent estimates conclude that approximately 40 million American youths participate in various sport organizations and 56% of all 5-10 year olds play sports (Ferguson, 1999). The increase in participation by female and male athletes (NFHS, 2002) has in turn created a universal need for a greater number of qualified high school and youth coaches. Currently, there are 3.1 million coaches working in all levels of youth sport (Clark, 2000), roughly 500,000 of whom are in high schools. Fewer than 8% of high school coaches (Martens, R., Flannery, T., & Roetert, P., 2002), and a much lower percentage of youth sport coaches, enter the field with significant knowledge regarding instruction, skill development or other formal training. While other countries require formal training, exams, certificates and licensing, American sport programs at all levels remain dominated by amateur coaches (Clark, 2000).

Status of Coach Education and Training in the United States

Well-designed training programs for coaches can result in: improved time management resulting in increased motor engagement time, positive changes in specific coaching behaviors and personality development in athletes (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). Research indicates that formal coaching education programs positively influence a coach's ability to affect learning and performance, yet programs seldom are mandatory and reach only a small minority of the nation's youth sport coaches (Clark, 2000).

The range of educational expectations for a coach is varied. The American Sport Education Program (ASEP) (2001) reports that 36 states require coach education for non-teaching coaches, 15 states require coach education for all coaching candidates and 15 states require no formal coaching education. Minimal expectations for high school and youth coaches range from having a bachelors degree in teaching with a current teaching certificate, to having no educational requirement and being at least 19 years old (McMillin & Reffner, 1999).

The Directory of College and University Coaching Education Programs (McMillin & Reffner, 1999) reports a total of 179 higher education institutions in the United States offering some sort of graduate degree program in coaching education or an undergraduate coaching education major or minor. Fifty percent of the undergraduate coaching minor programs require 18 to 24 credit hours for completion (McMillin & Reffner, 1999). Observations by McMillin and Reffner (1999, p. 4) regarding current undergraduate coaching majors indicate that 50% of the programs require a general principles of coaching course that includes the sport sciences, 90% of the programs require technical or theory courses in specific sports and 70% of the programs require a practical experience or internship. All of the programs require training in the prevention, care, and treatment of injuries.

Coaching education is also provided through numerous non-academic organizations. The Program for Athletic Coaches Education, the American Sport Education Program, the American Youth Soccer Organization, Special Olympics International and USA Volleyball are just a few of the many organizations that have coaching education programs. In addition, it is the mission of the National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education (NCACE) to support qualified coaches for sport participants through programs that provide quality coaching education. The essential function of NCACE is to review the quality of coaching education programs and encourage continuous improvement of coaching education. NCACE reviews coaching education/certification programs that seek accreditation.

National Standards for Coach Education

Competent coaches need to know the objectives and benefits of athletics so they know what to teach, model, and reinforce. Coaching education programs, therefore, should establish their explicit purposes so they correspond with the objectives and benefits of the program (Dils & Ziatz, 2000). In order to present knowledge that will be useful to those who need it most, the coach educators, clear direction must be provided in regard to what knowledge one should teach, what the best way is to teach this knowledge, and how to best assess this knowledge to encourage its development (Abraham & Collins, 1998).

The National Standard/Domains for Coaching Education

The first of these important knowledge questions has in part been addressed by the development of the National Standards for Athletic Coaches [NSAC] (NASPE, 1995). Over 140 sport organizations have agreed that there is a core body of knowledge from which to develop coaching expertise. Developed through a process of review of scientific and practical knowledge, synthesizing existing coaching education programs, public dialogue and review, the NSAC reflect the fundamental competencies that administrators, athletes and the public should expect of athletic coaches at various levels of experience.

The NSAC document contains 37 standards that are grouped into eight domains of knowledge and ability. Domain I, Injury Prevention, Care and Management focuses on how to protect and maintain the welfare and safety of all players. Standards within this domain encourage properly trained coaches to reduce the occurrence of injury, minimize the consequences of those injuries that may occur, and provide for appropriate emergency care

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when needed. By routinely checking for safe playing conditions, assuring that athletes are physically conditioned for their sport, and having the skills to administer basic first aid, the coach can create a more enjoyable sport experience (NASPE, 2001).

Domain II, Risk Management identifies the role coaches play in minimizing the potential risks inherent in sport participation. Standards prepare coaches by identifying the legal standards of care expected of all coaches. From appropriate supervision to adequate planning and record keeping, the coach's duty is to maximize the benefits of sport while reducing the inherent risks. A large part in the risk reduction process is understanding how parents and players can provide informed consent, and conveying the need for appropriate insurance (NASPE, 2001).

Domain III, Growth, Development and Learning contains standards that address individual and developmental differences in young players. Coaches must know benchmarks of healthy physical, mental, and psychosocial development, and how to plan and implement age and ability appropriate instruction. Accommodating differences in body size and motor maturity in instruction will lead to early motor success and self-confidence (NASPE, 2001).

Standards in Domain IV, Training, Conditioning and Nutrition are at the heart of successful athletic performance and athlete safety. Coaches need to understand the science of proper conditioning, and how the body's systems adjust with training. Standards identify specific coach competencies that translate into appropriate strength and cardiovascular performance goals, enhancing performance with good nutrition, and stressing the harmful effects of chemicals as related to alcohol, tobacco, and drug use (NASPE, 2001).

Domain V, Social/Psychological Aspects highlights the strong tie between the social, emotional and physical factors influencing potential outcomes of sport. Standards identify how coaches can develop a positive, confident athlete, while recognizing individual differences and needs. Competencies in this domain help coaches develop a positive coaching philosophy by keeping sport in perspective, maintaining emotional control and using esteem building motivational strategies to advance team and individual goals. Coaches can make a real difference in developing character, by modeling appropriate competitive behaviors and empowering athlete self control and personal responsibility (NASPE, 2001).

Domain VI, Skills, Tactics and Strategies deals with the essential knowledge of fundamental sport skills and game tactics. Standards address the planning of sequenced instruction of individual and team skills, game-like drills, and seasonal planning. Developing feelings of sport competence is key to continued sport participation. (NASPE, 2001).

Standards in Domain VII, Teaching and Administration, are essential to the pedagogical development of the coach. Standards address a variety of instructional methods in order to plan for systematic progression of skills. Competencies focus on building a repertoire of instructional techniques, as well as the art of selecting the right teaching method for the right learning situation. Coaches must also learn objective and effective procedures for evaluating and selecting players and staff, including how to diplomatically convey evaluation information. Competencies also address how to nurture public support by conveying the positive benefits of sport participation through effective public relations (NASPE, 2001).

Domain VIII, Professional Preparation and Development, identifies standards designed to increase awareness of the need for continued professional development and recommend additional resources for coaching hints, safety, sport science, and sport-specific information. Coaching clinics, supervised practical field experiences and experienced coach mentoring are ongoing aspects of professional development (NASPE, 2001).

Conclusions

The establishment and support of national standards for coach education provides the core for an integrated system of preparing qualified coaches. National Standards act to assure the public that professional preparation meets the critical needs of its constituency. Established standards foster continued improvement in the content and delivery of professional curricula and in the selection, guidance, supervision and assessment of the professional preparation of coaches. The establishment of National Standards for Athletic Coaching provides a consistent framework from which coach educators and coaching practitioners may establish accountability and credibility in the coaching profession.

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Mary E. Dilworth, Director

Patricia Sullivan, Associate Director — Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

Jody Brylinsky, Western Michigan University (author)

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